

‘Cyrano de Bergerac’: A piece de resistance

By LISA KRISTOFF, Arts & Entertainment Editor | Posted: Thursday, July 23, 2015 - 1:15pm

Event Location:

Heartwood Regional Theater Company



A famed scene from “Cyrano de Bergerac,” Cyrano (Lukas Raphael), center, professes feelings of love to Roxane (Marina Shay) while pretending to be Christian (Michael Golino), far right. LISA KRISTOFF/Boothbay Register

What will audiences love most about Heartwood’s production of “Cyrano de Bergerac”?

The swordplay? The romance? The Renaissance time period? The poetic dialogue? The perfect cast? I say all of this — and more, much more.

Most of us are familiar with some of Cyrano’s story: he loved but one woman, his cousin Roxane, but never pursued her though he was her intellectual equal, because of his large nose.

When we meet him, and all of the characters in this play, it is 1640. He is a grown man, all too aware of what those who meet him think. His nose is too large. It is distasteful. It is ugly.

To mask his own unhappiness with this facial feature, he pokes fun at himself, but allows no one else to do likewise. No one.

The nose aside, Cyrano is a leader within the Gascogne Army, and a respected soldier known for his precise swordsmanship and long blade. He is known for his bravery, loyalty. He is fiercely French. The white plume he wears in his hat is a symbol of many things: his military rank, his honor, and his noble, unstained character.

Cyrano is also a performer, playwright, poet and lover of all nature’s beauty. Cyrano de Bergerac is not merely a fictional character; he was a real man — Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac, born in 1619. The play, however, is a fictionalized story.

As in love as he is with Roxane, he can deny her nothing. When Roxane sends word, via her duenna (governess) that she wishes to meet with



him, he is guardedly excited. Could this be the moment they declare their love of one another?

No. It is the moment Cyrano learns of Roxane’s love for Baron Christian de Neuville, a handsome and wealthy, but not so very bright, young man.

Cyrano, upon learning from Christian that although he too loves Roxane, he feels inadequate when it comes to expressing his feelings or even merely conversing with her.

Cyrano volunteers to provide the words — aloud and written — to win her heart for another. In this way, Cyrano is able to express his love for his cousin, even though she will not know until it’s too late.

Later, Roxane asks Cyrano to promise to protect Christian de Neuville when he is being sent off to a battle (during the Thirty Years War). Roxane also asks him to be sure Christian writes to her.

There is a third man outside the love triangle, the Comte de Guiche, who has also fallen under the spell of Roxane. He is a man of power and wealth. He is also married. The Comte’s jealousy rules him and finally leads Cyrano, Christian, the Gascogne Cadets — and even the beloved Roxane into jeopardy.

Heartwood Director Griff Braley has assembled an exceptional cast. Exceptional.

The words, particularly those spoken by Cyrano, are vivid and rich. Sometimes comic, sometimes tragic, always heartfelt, poetic and romantic. Lukas Raphael’s performance as Cyrano is brilliant, charismatic. Raphael’s immersion into his character is so complete, I came away from the preview feeling a soul had been bared — but whose? Cyrano’s or Raphael’s?

Some of the best of those comic moments happen when the cadets/bakers/poets and cooks are on stage, with and without Cyrano. Tyson Bailey, Mark Bedell, Jeff Blanchette, Dylan Bright and Jacob De Heer: these guys, I tell you, are so engaging and funny (OK, maybe not as much when they’re the cadets) that you dare not take your eyes off them for fear of missing a quick gesture or fleeting facial expression.

And, while I’m talking comedic moments, Jay Pastucha portrays Ragueneau, the baker (and friend of Cyrano) who waxes poetic. His performance is priceless. Wait until you see him dueling with a loaf of bread or sizing up the efforts of his employees.

Joe McGrann as the Comte de Guiche makes a character who could be dismissed as a self-serving, despicable aristocrat — but human.

Marina Shay as Roxane is perfection. Her Roxane is complex. Although superficial, she is as much the romantic as Cyrano, yet at times as self-serving as the Comte. When Roxane discovers that it was Cyrano, not Christian, whose words so moved her, Shay conveys her character’s bewilderment. Roxane experiences a number of emotions simultaneously, including sorrow and loss. Shay takes us there, not over the top. But just enough.

The costuming for this show, by Joan Larkins Mather, is superb. Just stunning.

Makeup artist Katie Machaiek’s work on “the nose” alone is remarkable. Both Mather and Machaiek have a long list of creative creds — and it shows in this production.

The scenes involving sword fighting had me holding my breath a bit. The sound of the deftly wielded foils meeting, parting, meeting ... wow!

Mark Bedell’s sword fight choreography is graceful, breathtaking ... magnificent!

Braley uses this to the hilt and brings some dueling into the audience. Don’t get nervous, they’re actually on either end of the seating.

Set changes smoothly morph one into the other, always with some kind of action going on to grab the attention of the audience. There is a fight scene played out and letters are received by Roxane.

Lighting and use of a screen heightens the visual experience, and add complexity to the sparse set. Technical director Letitia Munson is a wonder.

Yes, I am convinced that when you leave Heartwood’s “Cyrano de Bergerac” you will be in complete agreement with me — this production is splendid!

The curtain goes up tonight, Thursday, July 23, the first of eight performances. Times and ticket prices vary, visit www.heartwoodtheater.org for details. Tickets may be purchased through the box office by phone and email: 207-563-1373 and boxoffice@heartwoodtheater.org. Reservations are very strongly recommended!

Performances are at the Parker Poe Theater, located at 81 Academy Hill Road in Newcastle.

Event Location:
Heartwood Regional Theater Company

Event Website:
<http://www.heartwoodtheater.org>

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